

DR. FRANCIS BOOTT.

FRANCIS BOOTT, M.D., died at his residence in London on Christmas morning, in the 71st year of his age. He was born in Boston, on the 26th of September, 1792. His father, Kirk Boott, came to this country early in life, from Derbyshire, England, became a successful merchant in Boston, was one of the pioneers of manufacturing enterprise here, and one of the founders of Lowell,—the type, if not wholly the original, of New England manufacturing towns. His Boston residence was on the site now occupied by the Revere House, of which the Boott mansion forms a part. Francis Boott entered Harvard University in the year 1806, and took his Bachelor's degree in 1810. A year after, being then in his nineteenth year, viz., in the summer of 1811, he sailed for England, intending to enter a counting-room in Liverpool, as a preparation for mercantile life. This plan, however, was soon relinquished; and the three succeeding years were mainly spent with his relatives and their friends near Derby, where he made the acquaintance of Mrs. Hardcastle, his future mother-in-law, who was something of a botanist, and where he formed both the scientific and social attachments which determined the aims and secured the happiness of his whole after life. Returning to Boston at the close of the year 1814, he engaged with enthusiasm in botanical pursuits, and amassed a good collection of New England plants. In the summer of 1816, he took a leading part in a botanical exploration of the mountains of New England, ascending, in the course of one journey, Wachusett, Monadnock, Ascutney, and Mt. Washington; and, later in the season, Dr. Boott with his brother visited and ascended Moose-hillock. His companions in the extended and then formidable tour which culminated in the White Mountains—then to be reached only by a laborious journey of two days on foot—were Francis C. Gray, Judge Shaw, Nathaniel Tucker, and Dr. Jacob Bigelow, the Nestor of New England Botany, now the sole surviving member of the party. An interesting account of the ascent of Mount Washington, written by Dr. Bigelow, was published at the time in the fifth volume of the New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery.

In the year 1820 Dr. Boott crossed the Atlantic for the last time, and, proceeding to London, entered upon the study of medicine, under the direction of the late Dr. Armstrong. He continued his medical studies at the University of Edinburgh, where he took the degree of M.D. in 1824. The next year he established himself in London, we believe in the very house in Gower street where he resided until the day of his death. He was soon associated with his near friend and former teacher in the work of instruction, becoming Lecturer on Botany in the Webb Street School of Medicine, where Dr. Armstrong was Professor of Materia Medica.

His lectures are said to have been admirable, both in matter and style, and to have excited much enthusiasm; whilst his untiring efforts



to promote the welfare of his pupils in other ways were so deeply and generally felt, that, on the eve of his too early withdrawal from the lectureship, they in one day raised a large subscription to present a testimonial to their friend and teacher;—a tribute which, with characteristic modesty and consideration, was declined as soon as heard of. He was, however, afterwards persuaded to accept a collection of books instead, in remembrance of their grateful feelings and good will."

The early death of Dr. Armstrong, cutting short a distinguished career, imposed upon his friend the duties of a biographer and expositor. Accordingly, after much preparation, Dr. Boott, in the year 1834, published two octavo volumes, entitled: "Memoir of the Life and Medical Opinions of John Armstrong, M.D.; to which is added an Inquiry into the facts connected with those forms of Fever attributed to Malana and Marsh Effluvium." He published, besides, in the year 1827, two Introductory Lectures on *Materia Medica*, which give a good idea of his excellence as a teacher. Although he did not continue in this career, his interest in medical and scientific education never abated. He was an active promoter of the establishment of London University (now University College), and was for more than a quarter of a century an influential member of its Senate and Council. He was successfully engaged for some time in medical practice, and was for many years Physician to the American Embassy; but he gradually withdrew from professional cares and toils to more congenial literary and scientific pursuits. As early as the year 1819 he had become a Fellow of the Linnaean Society of London; and afterwards, for the last twenty-five years, he gave it continuous and invaluable service as Secretary, Treasurer, or Vice President.

At one time it was thought that Dr. Boott might be recalled to his native country and to an active scientific life. Nearly thirty years ago he was offered the chair of Natural History in Harvard University,—a chair which had remained vacant since the death of Professor Peck in 1822, although its duties were for several years fulfilled by the late Mr. Nuttall. After Nuttall left Cambridge to explore Oregon and California, arrangements were made to endow the vacant professorship properly in case Dr. Boott would accept the place. Although the offer was declined, we have been told that he intimated a willingness to accept it if the chair were simply that of Botany; and when informed that he might practically make it so, although the title was unchangeable, he insisted that he would not be called a professor of Natural History, while he could pretend to a knowledge only of Botany.

Nearly thirty years ago, Dr. Boott began seriously to devote his energies to the special work upon which his scientific reputation mainly rests, viz., to the study of the vast and intricate genus *Carex*. The first result of these studies appeared in his elaboration of the *Carices* of British North America in Sir Wm. Hooker's *Flora Boreali-Americana*, published in 1840. Other papers upon *Carices* were contributed to the *Transactions of the Linnaean Society*, the *Journal of the Boston Society of Natural History*, &c. As it had always been the greatest pleasure, we might say the business, of his life to assist others, so now friends and correspondents from all parts of the world hastened to place in his hands the fullest sets of their collections in this difficult genus;

and he was able to study, in the unrivalled caricological collection he thus formed, and in the various public and private herbaria to which he had access, almost all of the 600 or more species which the genus was computed by him to comprise, to compare them in numerous specimens of their various forms, and to examine them, group after group, with untiring and closest scrutiny. At length, early in the year 1858, he gave to the world (literally *gave to the world*) the first volume of his great work, entitled *Illustrations of the Genus Carex*, a folio volume with 200 plates, admirably representing about that number of species. A very large proportion of them were North American species, in which he naturally always took a special interest. In the letter of dedication of this work to his friend John Amory Lowell, Esq., of Boston, Dr. Boott states that his original design "was limited to the illustration of the *Carices* of North America," but that the large collections brought by Dr. Hooker from the East Indies, and placed in his hands for study, caused him to extend his plan, and to endeavor to illustrate the genus at large. With characteristic modesty he makes no allusion to the years of labor and the large amount of money (savings from a moderate income by a simple mode of life) which the volume had cost him; the drawings, engravings, and letter-press having been produced at his sole individual expense, and the larger part of the copies freely given away. Nor did he put forth any promise to continue the work. But in 1860 Part Second quietly appeared, without a word of preface. This contains 110 plates. Two years after, this was followed by Part Third, with 100 plates, making 410 in all; and it is understood that the materials of a fourth volume are left in such forwardness that it may perhaps be published by his surviving family.

Our own estimate of this work has been recorded in the pages of this Journal, as the successive volumes were received. The motto which the author placed upon his title-pages:—

"The man who labors and digests things most,
Will be much apter to despair than boast,"

is felicitously expressive both of the endless difficulties of the subject, and of his undervaluation of his endeavors to overcome them. A most competent judge briefly declares that,—

"This work is certainly one of the most munificent contributions ever made to scientific botany, besides being one of the most accurate; on which account it certainly entitles its author to take a much higher place amongst botanists than that of an amateur, which was all that his modesty would allow him to lay claim to."

Dr. Boott's health, which had long been delicate, was much shattered in the winter of 1839-40 by a dangerous attack of pneumonia. "From this time he had repeated slight attacks; but no alarming symptoms occurred till June 1863, when the remaining lung gave way, and from that time he never fairly rallied. He died at his residence, 24 Gower street, on Christmas Day,—retaining to the last his faculties and all the characteristics of his most admirable life."

Dr. Boott was a man of singular purity, delicacy, and goodness of character, and of the most affectionate disposition. Few men of his ardent temperament and extreme sense of justice ever made less enemies or more

friends. To the latter he attached himself with entire devotion. If there were any of the former, probably no man ever heard him speak ill of them. His published works suffice to place his name imperishably upon the records of science. But only his contemporaries and friends will know how much he has done to help others, and how disinterestedly and gracefully that aid was ever rendered. He took with him to England, upon his return in the year 1820, a valuable herbarium of New England plants, especially those of the White Mountains, which were then rare and little known. He must have valued this collection highly, and have expected to use it. But he presented the whole of it to Dr., now Sir Wm. Hooker, when he saw how serviceable it would be to him in the preparation of the *Flora Boreali-Americanica*. His British herbarium was long ago similarly given to a then young American botanist. Another who, twenty-five years ago, called to take leave of him upon returning to this country, found, as he left, the seat of his cab loaded with choice botanical books, which Dr. Boott had at the moment sent there from the shelves of his own library, where they were not duplicates. We know of one or two instances where he had commenced a critical study of a particular genus with a view to publication, but, upon learning that another person had taken up the same subject, he despatched to him his own notes and other materials. The Linnæan Society of London owes no little of its present prosperity to his long and faithful services and his wise counsels. He kept up an active correspondence with his friends in this country; and for more than thirty years our young professional men, naturalists, and others, who have visited Europe, have experienced cordial welcome and thoughtful kindness at his hands. The following gives a good idea of the man:—

“When practising as a physician he discarded the customary black coat, knee-breeches, and silk stockings, for the very good reason that sombre colors could not but suggest gloomy ideas to the sick; and he was one of the first who adopted the custom, now universal in the profession, of dressing in ordinary costume. In doing this Dr. Boott adopted the blue coat, gilt buttons, and buff vest of the period, which he continued to wear to the last, and with which dress his casual acquaintance, no less than his personal friends, will ever associate him. In person he was so tall and thin as almost to suggest ill-health; and the refinement of his manners, his expression, address, and bearing were in perfect keeping with his polished mind and many accomplishments.”

The preceding extracts are from an excellent article in the Gardener's Chronicle for January 16, to which we are much indebted. In the first volume of the late Dr. Wallich's splendid *Plantæ Asiaticæ Rariores*, published in the year 1830, is the figure of a handsome and curious Butomaceous plant, *BOOTTIA CORDATA*, a genus dedicated “*in honorem Francisci Boott, Americani, botanici ardētissimi et peritissimi, amici dilectissimi, non minus animi probitate quam scientiarum cultu et morum suavitate egregii.*”

A. G.

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